

Statewide Public Assistance Advisory Council (SPAAC)

March 18-19, 2004
State Capital –Room 303
Helena, MT

Present:

Representative Tom Facey
Deb Spatzier, Yellowstone OPA
Philip Belangie, DOC
Marla Schreder, DOL
Dee Ann Hartman, Child Care
Mary Berg, Career Futures
Commissioner Janet Kelly, Custer County
Barb Gilskey, Fergus County OPA
Carolyn Squires, MT State AFL-CIO
Commissioner Janet Kelly, Custer County
Peggy Grimes, MT Food Bank
Betty Whiting
Paul Groshart, Richland Housing Auth.
Mary Caffero, WEEL
Mary Danford, Montana PEAKS
Katie Bremner, Glacier County OPA
Dave Morey, L & C County OPA

Excused Absence:

Commissioner Bill Kennedy

Unexpected Absence:

Toni Plummer-Alvernaz-

GUEST:

Tammy Poppe, Food Stamp Policy Specialist
Linda Fillinger, Early Childhood Ser, Bureau Chief.
Gail Gray; DPHHS Director
Jill Nelson, Food Stamp Unit Supervisor

DPHHS Staff:

Carol W. Carpenter, Staff to the Council/ TANF Program Officer
Linda Snedigar, TANF/Medicaid Policy
Hank Hudson, HCSD Administrator

Opening Statement:

Chairwoman, Marla Schreder, opened the meeting reviewing the agenda (**Exhibit A**) and welcome of new members.

Review September Minutes:

Chairwoman Schreder asked if there are any corrections or additions to the September 2003 minutes (**Exhibit B**).

MOTION: Motion carried to accept minutes with no changes.

Loss of FAIM Waivers (Food Stamp Program):

Hank Hudson briefly gave an overview of the loss of the FAIM Waivers discussed at the last meeting. Tammy Poppe (Food Stamp Policy Specialist) reviewed a December 10, 2003 letter sent to all Montana Food Banks **(Exhibit C)**. The letter outlined policy changes effective January 1, 2004. One change is only households with an elderly (age 60 or over) or disabled household member will continue to have a \$3000 resource limit. All other households will return to the previous \$2000 limit. Carolyn Squires expressed concern. Peggy Grimes stated food banks have received an increase in the number of requests for services in the last year. Some households are now requesting food bank services more than once a month. Policies regarding frequency of service varies between communities. Tammy Poppe stated the goal is to get everyone eligible for Food Stamps receiving. It was discussed that federal estimates on the number eligible and not receiving may not be accurate due to being solely based on income and not on other household circumstances. There was a discussion on the numerous reasons eligible households may not choose to receive. It was suggested that the Food Stamp Program consider issuing an annual lump sum (\$120) to some households instead their monthly allotment (\$10). This might make the program more attractive for the elderly in particular. It was also suggested to partner with local churches and Hank reminded members that only state employees can actually “push the button” to authorize food stamps. However, churches could distribute applications and act as a representative for applicants.

The Food Stamp Unit is working on a Food Stamp only application. The current application for food stamps benefits is a generic application for all programs administered by the Office of Public Assistance. Any comments on how to best change the application should be given to Tammy. (Applications were available in the back of the room for members to take.)

Loss of FAIM Waivers (TANF Program):

Hank Hudson reviewed a February 23, 2004 letter sent to Office of Public Assistance County Directors and Supervisors. **(Exhibit D)**. The letter outlines that effective July 1, 2004 TANF households will receive all case management services from the WoRC Contractors. The County OPA offices will continue to determine eligibility for all assistance programs. The impact on participants was discussed. Some WoRC office will need to increase their staff. Eligibility for programs, especially Medicaid, has become much more complex. Having all TANF case management services with the WoRC contractors will allow OPA staff to concentrate on the complex eligibility policies. However, due to the low wages for these positions, it remains difficult to maintain workers.

Several statistical documents **(Exhibit E and F)** were reviewed and discussed. These documents included “TANF Block Grant Analysis”, “Caseload Statistics”, “Conceptual Notes” and “This Week in Washington March 5, 2004”

TANF Sanction process:

“Sanction Statistics” document **(Exhibit G)** was reviewed and discussed. Under current policy the consequence for an adult who fails or refuses to comply with self-sufficiency activities is a grant reduction for one month and if they fail to come back into compliance during the reduced grant month the case is closed for a minimum of one month. Repeat sanctions have the same consequence. Adults have not modified their behavior under this policy because it allows an adult to simply state they will comply without actually ever complying. This means the only consequence is a reduced grant every other month. In the mean time they are using their federal time limited benefits and not fully utilizing the services available to them to learn skills to become self-sufficient.

Effective July 1, 2004 adults will need to actually comply with activities and not just state they will comply before they will be added back to the grant after the first sanction. For all subsequent sanctions there will not be a grant reduction. Instead the case will close for a minimum of one month. Concern was expressed that by closing the entire case kids are being punished for a parent’s non-compliance. It was stressed that prior to a sanction being imposed the case manager confirms there are not any extenuating circumstances (good cause) for the non-compliance. Also the case manager works with the household to develop a conciliation plan prior to recommending a sanction. It is only those households in which the adult has clearly made the choice to not comply that are sanctioned. Betty asked for examples of non-compliance and numerous generic examples were discussed.

Executive Planning Process (EPP)/Funding:

A letter sent January 29, 2004 to Partners and Interested Parties was reviewed **(Exhibit H)**. The letter requested input for planning for the next biennium. Approximately 200 responses were received. Some of the suggestions received were to raise benefits, reinstate diversion programs or provide positive reinforcements to participants.

Hank plans to continue to maintain a goal of four million dollars in reserve so we will not have to decrease benefits again in the future. There was discussion on consequences of listing this reserve for the legislature to review. One concern was that it might be viewed as a “slush fund” and taken away. It was stressed that it truly is not slush but a necessary proactive measure and education of legislature to influence perception is key.

Gail Gray:

Gail Gray (DPHHS Director) joined the meeting to give an update on the current fiscal outlook and upcoming legislative session. She stated DPHHS has enough funds to get through the Biennium. She was updated on the previous discussion and concerns about what might happen during the next legislative session.

TANF re-authorization:

Hank and Linda Snedigar explained the Department is still waiting for TANF reauthorization to occur on a national level. In anticipation of reauthorization changes, and because of the end of Montana's FAIM waivers, effective July 1, 2004 case management activities will change. A document titled "Current Law Without Waiver" (**Exhibit I**) was reviewed and discussed in detail. Portions of this document were discussed during the sanction discussion earlier in the day. WoRC Case Managers will negotiate all TANF participants' self-sufficiency activities. Activities are broken into primary and secondary activities. **Primary** activities count towards the first 20 hours per week for single parent households or 30 hours per week for two parent households. **Secondary** activities can be scheduled for no more than 10 hours per week for single parent households and 5 hours per week for two parent households.

Out-of-State TANF Months:

Carol Carpenter explained when a household applies for TANF in Montana and it appears they may have received TANF in another state or tribe the out-of-state entity is contacted to confirm the number of federal TANF months used. A statistical document listing details of the 1393 inquiries made in 2003 was reviewed (**Exhibit J**). Applicants most frequently come from California, Oregon, and Washington. However, Kentucky, Missouri, and New Hampshire had the highest average months per inquiry in 2003.

Extended TANF Cash Assistance (federal time limit of 60 mo.s):

The following documents were briefly reviewed:

- "At-Risk and Extension Update 02/27/04" (**Exhibit K**),
- "121 Households used their 60th mo in MT prior to 01/01/04" (**Exhibit L**),
- "34 Households Approved for TANF Extended Benefits & Closed prior to 01/01/04" (**Exhibit M**),
- "9 Households used their 60th mo out-of-state prior to 01/01/04 (no extended TANF benefits in MT)" (**Exhibit N**),
- "5 Households used their 60th mo out-of-state prior and received MT extension months due to administrative delay" (**Exhibit O**).

Mary Berg asked for clarification regarding time frames for verifying out-of-state months. Her specific concern was extensions approved solely due to administrative delay. Carol explained the goal is to get all out-of-state months confirmed within 30 days of the county making the request. However, we have no control over how promptly other states respond. California and Ohio have county operated TANF programs and some states have to review more than one computer system to accurately count months. Inquiries from other states regarding MT TANF months must all go to central office in Helena and the goal for turn around is 24 hrs.

Betty Whiting suggested a sub-committee be formed to determine how we can best assist households that have exhausted their time limit. She stated it appears we have failed these households and need to determine how we could have done better and what we can do now.

Dave Morey stated some households have a drug or alcohol addiction barrier that they were not willing to address during their 5 years of TANF

Mary Caffero supported Betty's suggestion to at least gather more data on what the households are doing that have exhausted all months. Concern was expressed regarding confidentiality.

MOTION: Betty made a formal motion to create a subcommittee to gather information on the current circumstances of the households who have exhausted their time limit and then think about the possibilities of what citizens could do.
Mary Caffero seconded the motion.

There was discussion of an amendment concerning specifically what information is desired.

AMENDMENT: Phillip Belangie motioned to amend the motion to include the data acquisition needs to include details of the household's "story". Exactly what were (are) their barriers to employment, what services were provided to address the barriers, and how are they currently supporting their family without any source of income.

Several members expressed concern that investigating the households' current situation could actually make their situation worse because staff will be required to act immediately on any information they become aware of rather than later at a scheduled redetermination. It was also questioned if the department can provide such detail and maintain confidentiality.

MOTION: Marla reworded the motion: Ask the department to give more information about people who have left TANF due to 60 months being exhausted and think about what citizens can do that does not breach confidentiality. Since the voice vote was so close a show of hands was needed. 6 in favor, 7 opposed and the remainder abstained. Motion failed.

Tribal Update:

Due to lack of Native American representation at the meeting a tribal update was again not available. However, Hank stated that Rocky Boy is working on a Tribal TANF proposal.

Community Operating Plan and Annual Agreement:

The current Community Operating Plan and Annual Agreement (**Exhibit Q**) was reviewed and suggested changes will be given to Karlene Grossberg.

Medicaid Redesign:

Hank Hudson reviewed the March 2, 2004 Memorandum to the Public Health Care Advisory Council from Peter S. Blouke (**Exhibit R**). The Medicaid Redesign is looking at a lot of issues. The document outlines 5 options the department supports and 6 options the department opposes. Each of the recommendations and proposals were reviewed in detail.

The third option supported by the department was debated. The option supports removing an adults' Medicaid coverage for non-compliance with the TANF program. Basically this is a Medicaid sanction during a TANF sanction. Based on the upcoming (July 1, 2004) changes to the sanction policy some members believed this would be inappropriate.

MOTION: Mary Berg moved that SPAAC go on record as opposing the recommendation to restrict Medicaid eligibility for adults who fail to cooperate with their TANF agreements. Katie Bremner seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Membership:

Marla explained that members are not appointed to this council. Nominations are given to Carol and Hank makes the determination of who will fill vacancies as voting members. All meetings are open to the public for comment. It was decided to add an additional voting seat to the council. This seat will represent Domestic Violence concerns. Several nominations were made and Hank will make a determination before the next meeting.

Application for food stamps:

Jill Nelson reviewed the current food stamp application (HCS 250- **Exhibit S**) which is a generic application used for all public assistance programs. As stated yesterday the Food Stamp Unit is working on an application specific to the Food Stamp Program. However, the majority of questions are federally required on a food stamp application. She reviewed the generic application stating specifically what questions are required and what could be removed. All comments should be given to Jill.

Philip asked if there is a budget in the Food Stamp Program to assist with marketing of the application. Jill stated it is not a budget item but they are working with Peggy Grimes on a grant that might include funds for marketing. The Grant is from USDA to do specific outreach activities.

MOTION: Philip stated social service agencies do not understand marketing and made a motion that a portion of funds be set aside to retain a private consultant who understands Montana and social service networks to assist in marketing. Mary Danford seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Travel Reimbursement:

Carol asked Council members to make sure and turn in their reimbursement form and check off on the roster of members in order to make sure everything is accurate.

Hank and Marla thanked the Council for their commitment to help. The next meeting will likely be prior to the legislature, maybe in October.

The meeting was adjourned.

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Agenda items for the next meeting:

1. Membership discussion (Are changes in representation needed? How do we get additional Tribal participation?)
2. Review updated Community Operating Plan Outline.
3. Update on Tribal concerns
4. Update on the Governor's Budget
5. View Orientation video.
6. Update on TANF reauthorization
7. Update on Medicaid Redesign
8. Updated statistics on Sanctions and Extended TANF
9. Review food stamp only application
10. Update on the status of food stamp outreach grants.
11. Preparation for legislature